



Bridgewater Review

Volume 29 | Issue 2

Article 8

Dec-2010

Violence Transformed 2010

Jonathan Shirland

Bridgewater State University, jonathan.shirland@bridgew.edu

Recommended Citation

Shirland, Jonathan (2010). Violence Transformed 2010. *Bridgewater Review*, 29(2), 15-18.

Available at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/br_rev/vol29/iss2/8

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

violence²⁰ transformed 10

Jonathan Shirland

V*iolence Transformed* is an annual series of exhibitions, performances and collaborative art-making events that are held in the greater Boston area. Since its beginnings five years ago, *Violence Transformed* has been composed of professionals from a wide range of backgrounds and disciplines, including art historians, studio artists, and specialists from the museum world. It has also included social workers, community service providers, clinical psychologists, art therapists, victims' rights advocates and social activists. The individuals and organizations involved are also geographically and ethnically diverse, and change yearly. What firmly unites us is our conviction that art, artists and art-making are powerful means of confronting and mediating violence in contemporary society. We adopt a very broad definition of what violence is and develop exhibitions that engage with issues of political, domestic, racial and sexual violence in their myriad forms. Every year the project culminates with an exhibition of visual works displayed at the Massachusetts State House, timed to coincide with National Crime Victims Rights Awareness Week and the annual conference of the Massachusetts Office for Victim Assistance (MOVA). The following images represent a small fraction of the artistic expressions that *Violence Transformed* has presented to the viewing public. I hope they give you a sense of the many ways in which violence can be transformed to humane ends by the act of making art.

Plans for *Violence Transformed* 2011 are now well under way, with the exhibition at the State House scheduled for

April 11–23. Please visit www.violencetransformed.com for more information about the history of the project and the exhibitions and events planned for 2011.

(Below) Detail from Urbano Project Display, Doric Hall, Massachusetts State House

From its inception, *Violence Transformed* has been committed to exhibiting art made by youth and teens alongside works by college students, community members, and professional artists. Part of the 2010 State House exhibit was curated by the teen visual arts curatorial program at the Urbano Project and was composed of works selected by them from their call for art, open to teens throughout the wider Boston area. The Teen Spoken Word Curators of the Urbano Project have also contributed a series of spoken word poetry and performance art pieces to *Violence Transformed*.



(Right) Combat Paper Project, Gutman Library, Harvard University April 24-May 7 2010
In April 2010, *Violence Transformed* was honored to co-organize and sponsor an exhibition of works by the Combat Paper Project in the Gutman Library of Harvard University, designed in conjunction with the main State House exhibit, at which further pieces by Combat Paper were on display. An artist collective based in Vermont, the project utilizes artmaking workshops to assist veterans in reconciling and sharing their personal experiences as well as broadening the traditional narrative surrounding service and the military culture. Through innovative papermaking workshops veterans use their uniforms as the medium for cathartic works of art. The uniforms are transformed into pulp and then into sheets of paper. The paper is used to create journals, broadsides, paintings and sculptures. The piece reproduced here powerfully arrests this transition, leaving the uniform and the paper produced from it in a state of suspended metamorphosis, highlighting the importance of the process as well as the artifact.

As the leaders of the project Drew Cameron and Drew Matott explain, "there is power to the ritual... each act is highly personal and liberating. It is called liberating rag. It is the first step in recognizing the story held within the fiber."

(Opposite page, top left) These printed articles of clothing are the work of Khalid Kodi. He was inspired by the story of Hawa Haggam, a high school teacher from Darfur whose family was killed by *janjawid* militia. The trauma caused her to lose



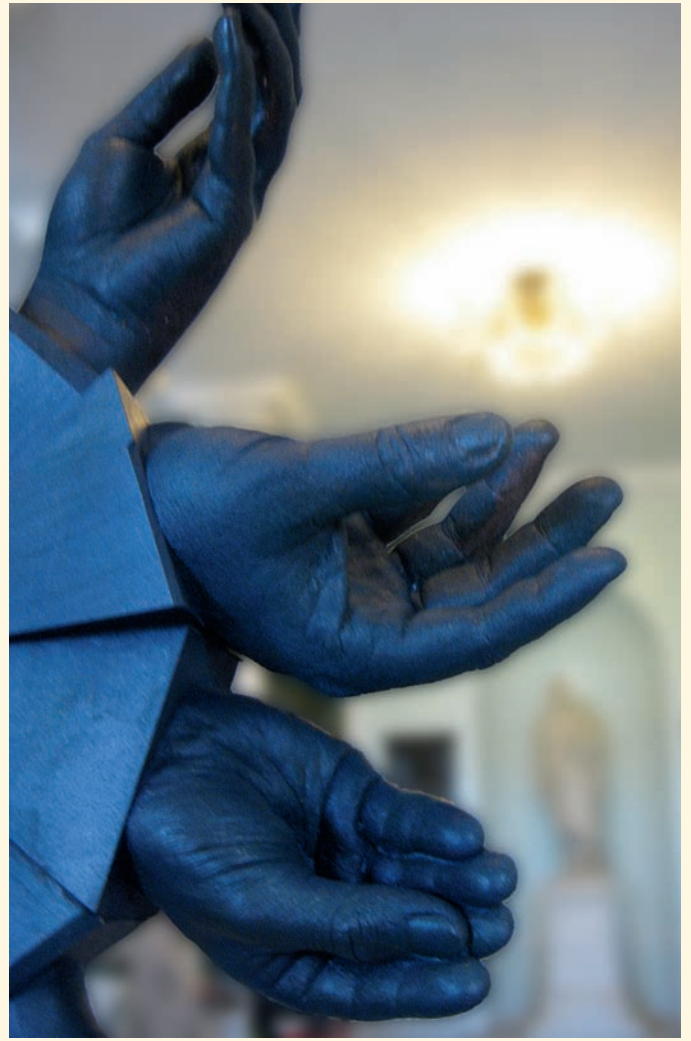
the ability to walk or speak. The garments, an upside-down T-Shirt and dirtied dress, are crusty and appear stained with mud and blood. They are sensually animate, and as such powerfully resonate with the trauma of loss. They also have prints of Hawa's lost family members on them, as if visualizing the ingraining of memory via material artifacts. They seem powerfully physical, yet at the same time evocative of the loss of physicality. We are left with traces of the bodies that once wore these ordinary clothes. The clothes themselves seem eerily like evidence at a crime

scene. Kodi's work was included in the portion of the exhibit curated by Edmund Barry Gaither, Director of The Museum of the National Center of Afro-American Artists.

(Opposite page, top right)
John W. Hooker — *Some Say More with Their Hands*
Cast plastic, steel
John Hooker's sculpture was a centerpiece at *Violence Transformed* 2010. Each beautifully cast hand was from a different member of his community, representing the daily choices we

make with our hands. Together those choices become the building blocks of our society. The composition of blocks refers both to architecture and machinery, each a symbol of complex individual parts together forming one collective body. The base references the Bunker Hill Monument, a symbol of Boston communities since 1823.

(Opposite page, bottom)
Rania Matar — *Defiant Haret Hreik*, Beirut 2006
Photographic Print on archival warm-tone fiber paper 24" x 36"



Rania Matar was born and raised in Lebanon before moving to the United States in 1984. Originally trained as an architect, from 2002 she started photographing Palestinian refugees in Lebanon

during one of her visits back to her homeland. She has returned every summer since. This photo captures a moment in the southern suburbs of Beirut, devastated

by war in 2006. A boy with a Spiderman T-Shirt snacks on an apple, a young girl in her best dress holds her half-eaten core away from her and rather too close to her mother's back, whilst propping a hand on her maturing hip. The mother takes a break in a plastic chair where her house once was, calling out, perhaps to her neighbors. It is an ordinary moment in time in a setting that is anything but ordinary. It is literally the human, cross-generational face of war's immediate aftermath. The gestures, especially the cocky yet brittle assertiveness of adolescence, is beautifully captured here, and is surely universally recognizable. She is posing for the camera

in her best dress, and the destruction is literally in the background - a backdrop to a human narrative of ordinary lives in Beirut. Here are three nameless victims, but they seem neither nameless nor helpless, and seeing them as victims feels like a disservice to them. In war, everyday moments become poignant. People have gone back to their destroyed homes to survey the damage and look for belongings in the rubble. But they have also gone back to socialize and keep in touch, to see and be seen. Their resilience is humbling.



(Above) The young performers of the Roxbury-based dance collective Endless Knot created a new routine for the opening reception of the *Violence Transformed* exhibition in 2008. Over the last five years, over 25 different groups of musicians, spoken-word performers and dancers have contributed to the project by performing at the State House. The diversity of these pieces, ranging from taiko drumming to classical Indian dance, rap to opera, is symbolic of *Violence Transformed's* commitment to bring together and celebrate the transformative power of all forms of creative expression.



(Right) Odaiko drummer Mark Rooney & Members of Opera UnMet performing at *Violence Transformed* Opening Night 2008. Mark Rooney has performed three times as part of the opening events of *Violence Transformed*, and his powerful drumming always focused the attention of the State House on our project despite the cacophony of other events and activities going on at the same time. Marshall Hughes is the founder and director of Opera Unmet, an urban opera company that has performed in major venues over the past

decade including the Hatch Shell, Symphony Hall and First Night ceremonies. Marshall is also the Director of Visual, Performing and Media Arts at Roxbury Community College, and served as the curator of performing arts for *Violence Transformed* in 2008 and 2009. He continues to serve as a Consultant for the project, and facilitates the exhibition *Violence Transformed: The Artists Voice* at the Resnikoff Gallery at RCC that has followed the State House show the past two years. We also stage annual exhibitions at Wheelock College, Lesley University and the Museum of the

National Center of Afro-American Artists as part of the *Violence Transformed* calendar of events.

(Top right) Jessica Langella - *Stuffed Animal Unicorn* Mixed Media 8' x 7' x 2'6" Jessica Langella's wonderfully sensuous, imposing work about childhood proved irresistible to many visitors to the State House during 2008's exhibition. She began with the intention of creating a life-sized horse as a fulfillment of a frustrated early fantasy of owning a pony. But the decision to cover the wire mesh frame



with old soft toys adds a compelling tension to the piece. The toys were bought on-line from a children's home and the act of cutting them up and splicing them together was surprisingly traumatic given that they were once crucial objects of comfort and refuge for children with little else to cling to. Nonetheless, this process created one large toy and a memorial to the importance of childhood fantasy and play as a space of refuge. Visitors were unable to resist touching it, even putting their heads inside the body cavity, and many commented on how a particular detail of the piece reminded them of a toy they once had. The unicorn served as a cross-cultural symbol of remembered innocence.

Jonathan Shirland is Assistant Professor of Art.

